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Senate

The Senate met at 2:15 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Our Creator and God, You provide us with strength. Lead us in life's battles. Keep us from retreating when we confront overwhelming challenges and painful losses. With Your powerful arm, chase away the forces that seek to confuse and discourage us. Let Your shining glory illuminate the road ahead. In Your kindness and mercy, rescue us from ourselves.

Guide the Members of this body in the path they should walk today. May their thoughts, words, and actions bring You pleasure. Teach them how to make concessions without coercion and to find conciliation without compromise.

We pray in Your loving Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The PRESIDENT pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The acting majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. SUNUNU. Mr. President, this afternoon we will resume consideration

of the Military Construction-Veterans Affairs appropriations bill. We will be voting later this afternoon. Once a vote is scheduled, we will notify Senators as to the exact timing of that vote. As it stands now, we are looking at a late afternoon vote as the first vote of the day. If we can expedite floor consideration with a handful of relevant amendments, it is our hope we should be able to finish this important spending bill today.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2007

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 5385, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3585) making appropriations for military quality of life functions of the Department of Defense, military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 11, 2007, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Akaka/Obama amendment No. 5128, to provide, with an offset, an additional \$2,500,000 for the Department of Veterans Affairs for the Office of Inspector General.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 5144

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, let me thank Senators HUTCHISON and FEINSTEIN, the managers of this bill, for the opportunity to offer and discuss my amendment to provide emergency agri-

cultural disaster assistance for our farmers and ranchers. Normally, most of my colleagues know I would not offer this amendment on an unrelated measure. Our hand is forced. We are told it is highly unlikely there will be an Agriculture appropriations bill considered separately. We have no alternative but to offer this measure to this legislation.

This amendment will determine whether thousands of farm families will be able to continue next year. We have had 2 years of unusual natural disasters that have affected agriculture across this country. These people need to know whether they can continue in the business of farming and ranching. Their bankers need to know. This legislation is critical to that determination.

For over a year, I, along with many of my Senate colleagues—let me indicate that it is already nearly 20 of my colleagues—have come on a bipartisan basis to cosponsor this bill, including Senator COLEMAN of Minnesota; Senator BEN NELSON of Nebraska; my own colleague, Senator DORGAN of North Dakota; Senator SALAZAR of Colorado; Senator HAGEL of Nebraska; Senator JOHNSON of South Dakota; Senator THUNE of South Dakota; Senator ENZI of Wyoming; Senator BAUCUS of Montana; Senator REID of Nevada; Senator CLINTON; Senator OBAMA; Senator DURBIN; Senator LEAHY; Senator HARKIN; Senator CANTWELL; Senator BURNS of Montana; Senator SCHUMER; and Senator ROBERTS of Kansas. Repeatedly, we have come to the Senate to try to get disaster assistance considered.

Last spring, as part of the hurricane supplemental, the Senate approved an agricultural disaster package for the 2005 crop-year. That measure was dropped in conference due to opposition from the administration and the House leadership. I have taken out the provisions that drew the opposition of the administration. Those direct payments that were an offset to the dramatic runup in energy prices are not in this bill.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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